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ABSTRACT

The Alaska Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) Committee sought to develop a coordinated plan of action to deal with the recruitment and retention of special education teachers, a significant problem for such a rural state with immense distances and widely diverse population centers. Two subcommittees were formed to work on personnel shortfall and recruitment and retention. Studies and surveys were reviewed to develop a comprehensive data bank related to the problem. These studies examined deterrents and incentives to teaching in special education. A survey of Alaska's special education teachers and regular education teachers was then designed, to determine deterrents and incentives for teaching special education and future teaching plans. (A copy of the survey form is provided. Survey forms were distributed in November 1992; results are not included in this paper.) In the area of recruitment, the CSPD's plan focuses on recruiting experienced teachers who already possess an endorsement or Master's degree in special education. The recruitment plan relies heavily on Alaska Teacher Placement (ATP), which serves as the clearinghouse and referral center for all Alaska districts. ATP conducts several large placement fairs and disseminates a recruitment brochure throughout the United States. The CSPD also commissioned the development of a recruitment videotape. (JDD)

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Collaborative Recruitment and Retention of Teachers: A Joint Responsibility

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The recruitment and retention of teachers represents a formidable task for any state particularly small rural states that lack personnel and resources. Alaska is no exception. In addition, it is confronted with an immense distances and widely diverse population centers. The geographic size of Alaska stretches more than 2800 miles from east to west and 1400 miles from north to south. Three large metropolitan areas contain 60 percent of the population of 523,000 people. The largest city is Anchorage with a population of 220,000, Fairbanks and the North Star Borough has 72,000 people, and the Juneau borough has 29,000 people. Some communities are considered hubs; that is, jets and other aircraft provide service to them because no roads link them to other communities. Some hubs include Bethel (population 4,400), Barrow (population 4500), Nome (population 3800) and , Kotzebue (population 3500). Smaller communities are usually only accessible by light aircraft and/or boat; these communities are typically Alaska Native villages which range in size from 50 to 500 people. Alaska Native populations include Athabascan, Tlinget, Haidas, Inupiag,ect. The ethnic mix of the State is quite diverse with Anglos, Alaska Natives, Mexican-Americans, African-Americans, Koreans, Japanese, etc. All of these factors influence the recruitment and retention of teachers and necessitate a collaborative effort by all stakeholders. This has been the charge of the Alaska Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) Committee.

During October of 1991, the CSPD Committee met to discuss state problems and to develop a coordinated plan of action. The Co-Chairs of the Committee were Jim Rich, Alaska Director of Special Education, and Lizette Stiehr. Committee members included numerous individuals from a variety of constituencies including regular education teachers, special education teachers, district superintendents, educational service agencies, early intervention specialists, Alaska Teachers Association, parent groups, institutions of higher education (IHE's), and rural and remote representatives. Every effort was made to have representation from all constituencies across the State. This represents a formidable task considering the size and diversity of the State.

During the initial meeting, committee members volunteered to serve on a variety of subcommittees each of which had a specific goal. Some committees developed Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for special school projects and others focused on the development of inservice modules for districts that did not have access to continuing education. This paper focuses on the collaborative efforts of two committees that worked on Personnel Shortfall and Recruitment and Retention.

The personel shortfall in Alaska has been discussed for many years. In the past, the "bandage approach" has been implemented. Individuals from out of state have been recruited and special legislation authorized emergency credentials and waivers. Little data was collected to analyze the problem however. With this in mind, the committee agree to undertake the following tasks:

1. Develop a comprehensive data bank related to recruitment and retention
2. Analyze the problems
3. Develop CSPD activities to address the problems

Initial meetings reviewed a variety of teacher shortfall and recruitment and retention studies and surveys. Two studies were reviewed extensively. The study by Billingsley and Cross (1991b) involved regular education teachers who had never taught in special education, but were certified to do so. Their sample of 82 teachers throughout Virginia rated deterrents and incentives to teaching in special education. The results revealed three major deterrents: (a) 76 percent enjoyed teaching in general education so they felt no reason to change; (b) more than 37 percent planned to teacher in special education originally, but no positions were available when they applied for jobs; and (c) 24 percent

no longer planned to teach in special education after observing special education in the public schools. Numerous incentives were noted and grouped by components into three factors reflecting administrative support, professional treatment and availability of desired positions. Some of the highest frequencies were associated with (a) more resources and materials are available for the classroom, (b) higher salaries are paid to special education teachers and (c) opportunities to move from special to regular education teaching at the end of 1 to 3 years.

Based on this information, Billingsley and Cross (1991b) stated three implications for educational agencies. First, educational agencies need to take action to make special education teaching more attractive and satisfying by providing adequate support systems for teachers, reducing paperwork, and securing needed resources. Second, administrators should consider recruiting general education teachers when other qualified candidates are not available; however, prospective teachers' interests, suitability, and qualifications to teach disabled students need to be carefully examined. Third, educational agencies should consider recruiting general educators who do not hold special education certification from areas where there is a surplus of teachers.

The other study involved longitudinal work completed by Schnorr (1992a & 1992b) in Arizona. Her surveys focused on recruitment and retention of special education teachers across schools that had large enrollments of Native American students in Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado. In order to be included in the data bank, schools had to have 20 percent or greater enrollments of Native American students. During 1989 -90, 54 public, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and private schools hired a total of 132 new special education teachers which represented a 24 percent turnover rate and 10 positions remained unfilled. This is sometimes referred to as New Hires. A follow-up survey during September of 1991 of a larger school sample (N=95) revealed the fact that 150 new special education teachers were hired (20 percent New Hires). Schnorr (1992a & 1992b) noted that small schools, with student enrollments of less than 300 students, had more difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers than did larger schools. Unfortunately, most of the small schools were BIA schools which also used different salary structures, usually lower. Some schools, again primarily BIA schools, experienced considerable difficulty recruiting teachers so 23 positions went unfilled. In most cases, the classroom was staffed with a paraprofessional aid for the year.

Similar data for Alaska exists. Based on the 1991 Statewide Educator Supply & Demand Report (LaBerge, 1991), 147 new special education teachers were hired for the 1991 school year out of a total of 549 special education teachers throughout the State. This equates to 27 percent New Hires in special education across the State. The report also analyzes all 55 school districts in relation to the percent of teacher turnover on a yearly basis. Unfortunately, this data is not reported for special education. With a turnover of more than one-quarter of all special education teachers throughout the State, this constitutes a major problem for Alaska and it needs to be adequately addressed.

Schnorr (1992a & 1992b) also queried districts regarding the possible reasons for not being able to recruit and retain teachers in their districts. The problem mentioned most frequently was the rural setting, the distances involved with travel and the isolation. These three were grouped together because they were inextricably related. The other problems included an insufficient supply of special education teachers applying for jobs, low pay in rural areas that was not competitive with metropolitan pay scales, and a lack of housing. Other studies mention a variety of factors that adversely affect teaching conditions including low salaries, remote geography and cultural differences. Many of these have been mentioned in the literature along with lack of respect, limited opportunities for advancement, time off to raise a family, lack of curricular independence, etc. (Cherniss,

1988; Darling & Hammond, 1984; Kaiser, 1981; Wangl, Metzger & Levitov, 1984; Billingsley and Cross, 1991a, and Platt & Olson, 1990).

After reviewing a variety of studies including the above studies and survey questionnaires, the Committee developed a research design to capture all data needed for the development of a total analysis system. The research design included the following activities: (a) to survey special education teachers to determine job deterrents and future teaching plans, (b) to survey regular education teachers to determine deterrents and incentives for teaching special education and future teaching plans, (c) to use the already existing data collection service of the Alaska Teacher Placement Office housed at the University of Alaska Fairbanks to collect school district data related to recruitment and retention, and (d) to determine what if any data was accessible through the Alaska Department of Education central computer system which was under rennovation. This paper focuses on the first two activities - the survey of special and regular education teachers.

The final form of the survey was developed during during April 1992. Originally, the survey was to have been distributed through the Alaska Department of Education. After considerable discussion; however, this plan was changed and the Alaska NEA distributed the survey. The fact that the Alaska NEA volunteered to undertake this activity reflects the high level of collaborative effort among all members of the CSPD in Alaska. The responsibility to recruit and retain qualified special education teachers throughout the State is truly shared across disciplines.

During November 1992, the surveys were distributed to teachers throughout Alaska who possessed a special education endorsement. The sample population included teachers who were currently teaching in the area of special education as well as teachers who were teaching in regular education. A copy of the survey appears in Table 1. The survey is designed to capture a variety of data that will be used by the CSPD to determine future needs throughout the State. Some of these concerns are addressed in the following paragraphs.

Insert Table 1 about here

One problem frequently mentioned by districts is the fact that teachers hired from the lower "48" stay only one or two years in rural and remote districts and then move to a larger districts closer to a hub or one of the metropolitan areas. Survey questions 1 and 10 are designed to collect data related to this problem. Question 1 will allow us to track this movement and question 10 will give us data related to future plans.

Future plans of teachers have not always be sampled in the past. This represents a design error and in Alaska it is a critical component. The Alaska Teacher Retirement System allows retirement benefits after eight years of teaching and full retirement benefits to individuals of any age who have 20 years of service. Currently, a large number of teachers are approaching 20 years of service and proposed legislation may offer them a special retirement package during January 1993. Should this scenario continue, up to 30 percent of currently employed teachers could retire next year; this would create a serious shortage of teachers throughout the State. Question 10 is designed to sample these future plans.

Another component related to future planning is sampled in question 3. This question explores endorsements and teachers' willingness to teach various disabilities in the

future. If teachers are willing to teach special education in the future, CSPD can explore various incentives to encourage them to do so.

In an effort to meet this future personnel shortfall, CSPD has developed a coordinated recruitment plan. The plan focuses on the recruitment of experienced teachers who already possess an endorsement or Master's degree in special education. School districts prefer to hire experienced teachers because most programs in rural and remote areas use a consultant/resource model that is best staffed with experienced teachers. The Alaska Teacher Placement has developed and disseminated a recruitment brochure titled "Alaska Follow the Dream." Thes are being distributed through their office at recruitment fairs in the lower "48" and all CSPD members are distributing them at professional meetings they attend. CSPD also commissioned the development of a 14 minute recruitment video tape titled "Don't Listen to Aunt Louise." The video interviews numerous special education personnel and shows clips from throughout the State; it will be distributed in a similar fashion to the brochure.

This coordinated recruitment plan relies heavily on Alaska Teacher Placement (ATP). It has been in existence since 1974 and serves as the clearinghouse and referral center for all districts throughout the State. During the spring and summer, ATP runs several large placement fairs in Anchorage and Fairbanks during the spring and summer; nearly 600 teachers from throughout the US attend these fairs. School districts from throughout the State schedule interviews with teachers at the fairs; this reduces travel costs and scheduling problems for small districts. The utilization of this already existing service helps school districts as well as prospective teachers.

Information gathered through the survey will be shared with all stakeholders in Alaska. In addition, the results will be discussed with individuals currently enrolled in preservice course work through the University of Alaska Anchorage. This will allow prospective special education teachers to better understand the working environment and the job market.

Table 1

ALASKA SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER SURVEY

1. List Alaskan school district names and indicate your teaching responsibilities below:

	Alaska District	Circle All That Apply
1992-93	_____	General Ed. Sp. Ed.
1991-92	_____	General Ed. Sp.Ed.
1990-91	_____	General Ed. Sp.Ed.
1989-90	_____	General Ed. Sp.Ed.
1988-89	_____	General Ed. Sp.Ed.

2. What is your current grade level assignment (Circle all that apply).
Preschool K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

3. For each of the following exceptionalities, please check (X) those in which you (a) hold Alaska endorsement, (b) have taught - list state if other than Alaska, and (c) would consider teaching in the future.

	(A) Alaska Endorsement	(B) Have taught List state(s)	(C) Teach in Future
Visually impaired			
Hard of hearing			
Deaf			
Orthopedically handicapped			
Speech impaired			
Mentally retarded			
Other health impaired			
Seriously emotionally			
Multihandicapped			
Learning disability			
Deaf-blind			
Gifted-talented			
Preschool handicapped			
Cross categorical			

4. How many years of teaching experience do you have? _____

5. How many years of teaching experience do you have in special education? _____

6. What is your highest education level?
_____Bachelor's
_____Master's
_____Specialist
_____Doctorate

7. Gender: Female_____ Male_____

8. Please indicate the extent to which each of the following represent incentives to teaching special education for you personally. Please rate by circling one response for each item below and check if the incentive is available to you:

	(1) Not Important	(2) Potential Incentive	(3) Definite Incentive	Incentive Available
1. Supportive building principal	1	2	3	
2. Principal supports educational change	1	2	3	
3. Sufficient supplies and materials	1	2	3	
4. Mental health/stress reduction options	1	2	3	
5. Job rotation options (special education to regular education	1	2	3	
6. Day care available for your children	1	2	3	
7. Job sharing, half-time position option	1	2	3	
8. Professional development opportunities onsite	1	2	3	
9. Advanced degree opportunities on site	1	2	3	
10. Release time for professional development	1	2	3	
11. Stipends for pursuing additional endorsements	1	2	3	
12. Financial support for attending summer workshops	1	2	3	
13. Access to professional literature	1	2	3	
14. Mini grants for special classroom projects	1	2	3	
15. Career ladder to supervisory role	1	2	3	
16. Collaboration with university faculty	1	2	3	
17. Adjunct professor opportunities	1	2	3	
18. Teacher assistance teams within district	1	2	3	
19. Teacher exchange options with other districts	1	2	3	
20. Special education teacher network to share ideas	1	2	3	
21. Access to library of videotapes for professional development	1	2	3	
22. Community support and eagerness to welcome teachers	1	2	3	
23. Mentoring or partnerships available to new teachers in districts	1	2	3	
24. School/district recognition of professional efforts	1	2	3	
25. Sharing educational programs with community via media	1	2	3	
26. Teacher appreciation is a community value	1	2	3	
27. School is the center of the community	1	2	3	

9. Please indicate the extent to which each of the following represent a deterrent to teaching in special education for you personally. Please rate by circling one response choice for each of the items below.

	(1) No Deterrent	(2) Potential Deterrent	(3) Definite Deterrent
1. Demands of working with special education population	1	2	3
2. Legal issues/liability	1	2	3
3. Lack of cooperation regarding integration from classroom teachers	1	2	3
4. Lack of support/cooperation from central office administrators	1	2	3
5. Lack of transfer opportunities	1	2	3
6. Lack of support/cooperation from building principals	1	2	3
7. Too many students on caseload	1	2	3
8. Too much diversity in student needs	1	2	3
9. Disruptive/difficult students	1	2	3
10. Too much paperwork	1	2	3
11. Lack of interaction with other professionals/isolation	1	2	3
12. Problems with parents	1	2	3
13. Inadequate teaching materials and resources	1	2	3
14. Inadequate training to teach assigned students	1	2	3

10. Think about your professional goals for the next three years. Which of the following reflect your plans? (Rank up to three with 1 representing your highest priority goal.)

____Continue teaching in special education in this district
____Continue teaching in special education in another Alaska district
____Continue teaching in special education out of state
____Transfer to a related service position in this district
____Transfer to a related service position in another Alaska district
____Transfer to a related service position out of state
____Transfer to special education administration in this district
____Transfer to special education administration in another Alaska district
____Transfer to special education administration out of state
____Transfer to regular education
____Transfer to regular education administration
____Transfer to higher education
____Leave education for a different career
____Retire with TRS benefits
____Retire early with next state buyout